



Office of the State Fire Marshal

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE ILLINOIS STATE FIRE MARSHAL ENCOURAGES FIRE SAFETY DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

SPRINGFIELD – With the holiday season upon us once again, the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal reminds all Illinois residents to be vigilant about the fire risks presented by Christmas trees, decorations, overloaded extension cords and candles. They carry tremendous danger when unattended, and are often linked to seasonal home fires.

In 2013, 91 house fires reported in Illinois were caused by Christmas trees and other decorations. Those fires resulted in more than \$1.7 million in property loss.

“The holidays are a busy time, therefore it is easy to get swept up in the holiday spirit and forget about fire risks and safety,” said State Fire Marshal Matt Perez. “However, taking extra precautions when dealing with decorations, cooking and entertaining can help keep your holiday merry and fire-free.”

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), between 2009 and 2013, two of every five fires in December and January were linked to Christmas trees, holiday lights and other decorations. The same report indicates that U.S. fire departments have responded to an average of 210 Christmas tree fires annually.

The OSFM offers the following tips to residents who want their holidays to be enjoyable and safe:

Christmas Trees

- Make sure the tree is not blocking an exit and is at least three feet away from any heat sources such as fireplaces, radiators, candles, heat vents or space heaters.
- Always turn off Christmas tree lights before leaving the room or going to bed.
- When using an artificial tree, be sure it is labeled, certified, or identified by the manufacturer as UL listed.
- Make sure artificial trees are tested and labeled as fire resistant.
- When using a fresh tree, make sure the green needles don't fall off when touched. This could mean that the tree is brittle and dry, and therefore hazardous.
- Put your tree in a sturdy, water-holding stand. Before placing the tree in the stand, cut 1-2" from the base of the trunk. Add water to the tree stand, and be sure to water daily.
- After Christmas, promptly remove the tree. Dried-out trees are a fire hazard and should not be left in the home or garage, or placed outside the home.

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Holiday Lights

- Use lights that have the label of an independent testing laboratory
- Determine whether lights are designed for indoor or outdoor use. Only use indoor lights indoors, and outdoor lights only outdoors.
- Replace any string of lights with worn or broken cords, or loose bulb connections.
- Never overload extension cords, outlets or power strips. Use no more than three light sets on any one extension cord.
- Extension cords should be placed against the wall to avoid tripping hazards, but do not run cords under rugs, around furniture legs, or across doorways.
- Never use lit candles to decorate the tree. Read the manufacturer's instructions for the number of LED strands that are safe to connect.
- Bring outdoor electrical lights inside after the holidays to prevent hazards and make them last longer.
- Keep a fire extinguisher close by.

Candles

- Consider using flameless candles, which look and smell like real candles. If you do use traditional candles, keep them at least 12 inches away from anything that can burn, and remember to blow them out when you leave the room or go to bed.
- Use candle holders that are sturdy, won't tip over, and are placed on uncluttered surfaces.
- Avoid using candles in the bedroom, where two of five U.S. candle fires begin, or other areas where people may fall asleep.
- Never leave a child alone in a room with a burning candle.
- Always put candles out before leaving the room.
- Never use lighted candles near trees, boughs, curtains or drapes, or with any potentially flammable item.
- Keep a fire extinguisher close by.

For more information about fire safety and prevention, please visit <http://www.sfm.illinois.gov> or www.nfpa.org

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